

EVALUATING ASSIST

A Blueprint for Understanding State-Level Tobacco Control

Successes and challenges of the ASSIST evaluation

The American Stop Smoking Intervention Study for Cancer Prevention (ASSIST) was one of the most ambitious publicly funded tobacco use prevention and control efforts in history. As a measure of its success, ASSIST interventions were adopted in numerous settings beyond the ASSIST states and tailored to unique state and local conditions.

The inherent complexity of ASSIST presented significant challenges to its evaluators. Unlike standard evaluations that document program processes, implementation, and outcomes, the ASSIST evaluation relied on the construction of logic models, use of a network of stakeholders for model validation, and development of a prototype knowledge base. A conceptual model showing the relationships between ASSIST interventions, “upstream” changes attributable to ASSIST, and subsequent reductions in tobacco use prevalence guided the evaluation.

Components of the ASSIST evaluation

The ASSIST evaluation required new measures, new national data collection efforts, and new methodologies, including:

- The Strength of Tobacco Control (SoTC) index, a measure of a state’s resources for tobacco use prevention and control; capacity and infrastructure to deliver those tobacco control efforts; and policy, media, and program services geared toward achieving ASSIST goals
- The Initial Outcome Index (IOI), an aggregate measure requiring new measures of state and local clean indoor air legislation and of state dependence on tobacco growing and manufacturing
- A measure of newspaper coverage of ASSIST policy priority areas
- A measure of tobacco industry efforts to interfere with ASSIST
- State contextual factors affecting tobacco use prevention and control
- Development and implementation of the Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey
- Hierarchical methods to aggregate survey items into single index measures

Conclusions

Many global health problems result from complex interactions between individual behavior, economics, politics, socio-cultural factors, and national and international corporate interests. Evaluating multi-faceted interventions that can effectively address these problems requires an approach that incorporates these components in context. The framework described in this monograph will be useful in evaluating future tobacco use prevention and control efforts in the United States and around the world. It also serves as a comprehensive resource for those who evaluate other population-based behavioral health or social interventions that, like ASSIST, cannot be evaluated using randomized controlled trial models.

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